

role of  
time in  
the novel

About four o'clock in the afternoon of the Picnic, Mrs Appleyard awoke from a long luxurious nap on the drawing-room sofa. She had been dreaming, as she often did, of her late husband. This time they were walking along the Pier at Bournemouth, where a number of pleasure craft and fishing boats were tied up. 'Let us go for a sail, my dear,' said Arthur. A fourposter bed with an old-fashioned box mattress was bobbing about on the waves. 'Let us swim for it,' said Arthur, and taking her arm dived into the sea. To her surprise and pleasure she found herself swimming beautifully, cutting through the water like a fish, without using her legs or arms. They had just reached the fourposter and were climbing on board when the sound of Whitehead running the lawn-mower under the window put an end to the delightful dream. How Arthur would have revelled in the respectable luxuries of life at Appleyard

dream of appleyard - what does it reveal?



There was a scrape of the desk on the floorboards as Mrs Hemans went hurtling towards the locked door.

The sun had gone down in a blaze of theatrical pink and orange behind the College tower. Mrs Appleyard had eaten a substantial supper on a tray in her study: cold chicken, Stilton cheese and chocolate mousse. Meals at the College were unfailingly excellent. Sara had been sent to bed dry-eyed and unrepentant with a plate of cold mutton and a glass of milk. In the lamp-lit kitchen Cook and a couple of the maids were playing cards at the scrubbed wooden table, capped and aproned ready for the imminent return of the picnickers.

The night gradually darkened and thickened. The tall almost empty house for once had fallen silent, filled with shadows, even after Minnie had lighted the lamps on the cedar staircase where Venus, with one hand strategically placed upon her marble belly, gazed through the landing window at her namesake pendant above the dim lawns. It was a few minutes past eight o'clock. Mrs Appleyard, playing patience in her study, with one ear cocked for the sound of the drag coming up the gravel drive, decided to ask Mr Hussey to step inside for a glass of brandy . . . there was still enough left in the decanter since the Bishop of Bendigo had lunched at the College.

Mr Hussey, over several years of experience, had proved himself so punctual and entirely reliable that at half past eight by the grandfather clock on the stairs, the Headmistress rose from the card table and pulled the velvet cord of her private bell, that jangled with authority in the kitchen. It was immediately answered by Minnie,

rather red in the face. Mrs Appleyard, from whom the housemaid stood at a respectful distance in the doorway, noted with disapproval the crooked cap. 'Is Tom about still, Minnie?'

'I don't know, Mum, I'll ask Cook,' said Minnie, who had last seen her adored Tom half an hour ago, stretched out in his underpants on the truckle bed in her attic room.

'Well, see if you can find him and send him to me as soon as you do.'

After two or three more rounds of Miss Milligan, Mrs Appleyard, who normally despised the luxury of cheating at patience, deliberately dealt herself a necessary Knave of Hearts and went out on to the gravel sweep before the porch, where a lighted kerosene lantern swung from a metal chain. Against a cloudless dark blue sky the slate roofs of the College glimmered like silver. In one of the upstairs rooms a solitary light was burning behind a drawn blind: Dora Lumley, off duty and reading in bed.

The scent of stocks and sundrenched petunias was overpowering on the windless air. At least the night was fine and Mr Hussey a driver of high renown. All the same she wished young Tom could be found, if only to agree with his Irish commonsense that there was nothing to worry about in the drag being nearly an hour late. She went back to the study and began another game of patience, getting up almost at once to compare her gold watch with the clock in the hall. When it struck for half past nine she rang for Minnie again, and was informed that Tom was taking a hot bath in the coach house and would be there 'directly'. Another ten minutes dragged by.



*propaganda + reliable Tom*

At last came the beat of hooves on the highroad, perhaps half a mile away . . . now they were crossing over the culvert . . . she could see lights moving on the dark trees. A chorus of drunken voices as the vehicle gathered speed on the flat road and passed the College gates at a fast trot – a dragload of revellers returning from Woodend. At the same moment Tom, who had heard them too, presented himself in carpet slippers and a clean shirt at the open door. If Mrs Appleyard had a liking for anyone in her immediate orbit it was surely merry-eyed Irish Tom. No matter what was asked of him, from emptying the pig bucket to playing a tune on the mouthorgan for the maids, or driving the drawing mistress to the Woodend Station, it was all the same to Tom. ‘Yes, Ma’am? You were after wanting me, so Minnie was saying?’

Under the unshaded light of the porch the heavy folded cheeks were the colour of tallow. ‘Tom,’ said Mrs Appleyard, looking him full in the face as if to screw an answer out of him with her gimlet eyes, ‘do you realize that Mr Hussey is shockingly late?’

‘Is that a fact, Ma’am?’

‘He promised me faithfully this morning to have them back here by eight o’clock. It is now half past ten. How long would you say it takes to drive from the Hanging Rock?’

‘Well, it’s a fair step from here . . .’

‘Think carefully, please. You are familiar with the roads.’

‘Say three to three and a half hours and you wouldn’t be far out.’

‘Exactly. Hussey intended to leave the Picnic Grounds soon after four o’clock. Directly after tea.’ The carefully modulated College voice became suddenly raucous. ‘Don’t stand there gaping at me like an idiot! What do you think has happened?’

In the lilting Irish singsong that fluttered many a female heart beside his Minnie’s, Tom was soothing at her side. If the distraught face had been reasonably kissable, he might even have dared a conciliatory peck on the flaccid cheek, unpleasantly close to his well scrubbed nose. ‘Now don’t you be distressing yourself, Ma’am. It’s five grand horses he’s driving and him the best coachman this side of Bendigo.’

‘Do you think I don’t know all that? The point is – have they had an accident?’

‘An accident, Ma’am? Well, now, I never so much as gave it a thought, such a fine night and all . . .’

‘Then you’re a bigger fool than I thought! I know nothing of horses but they can bolt. Do you hear me, Tom? Horses can bolt. For God’s sake, say something!’ It was one thing for Tom to stall and cajole in the kitchen. Quite another here in the front porch with the Headmistress standing over him twice as large as life with her tall black shadow behind her on the wall . . . ‘Ready to eat me she looked,’ he told Minnie afterwards, ‘and the devil of it was I knew in my bones the poor creature was right.’ Greatly daring he put a hand on one grey silk wrist encircled by a heavy bracelet from which hung a blood red heart. ‘If you’d come inside and sit down for a wee while, Minnie can bring you a cup of tea . . .’



'Listen! What's that? God be praised, I can hear them now!'

It was the truth, at last: hooves on the highroad, two advancing lights, the blessed scrape of wheels as the drag came slowly to a halt at the College gates. 'Woa there Sailor . . . Duchess get over . . .' Mr Hussey talking to his horses in a voice almost unrecognizably hoarse. From the dark mouth of the drag the passengers came straggling out one by one into the light of the carriage lamps fanning out on to the gravel drive. Some crying, some sodden with sleep, all hatless, dishevelled, incoherent. Tom had gone bounding off down the drive at the first hint of the drag's approach, leaving the Headmistress to dragoon her trembling limbs into a commanding stance on the porch. First to come stumbling towards her up the shallow steps was the Frenchwoman, ashen under the light.

'Mademoiselle! What is the meaning of all this?'

'Mrs Appleyard - something terrible has happened.'

'An accident? Speak up! I want the truth.'

'It's all so dreadful . . . I don't know how to begin.'

'Compose yourself. A fit of hysterics will get us nowhere . . . And where in Heaven's name is Miss McCraw?'

'We left her behind . . . at the Rock.'

'Left her behind? Has Miss McCraw taken leave of her senses?'

Mr Hussey was pushing through the sobbing wild-eyed girls. 'Mrs Appleyard, may I speak to you alone? . . . I think the French lady is going to faint.' He was right. Mademoiselle, exhausted with the strains and stresses of the day, had passed out on the hall carpet. From the

servants' quarters Minnie and Cook, who had long since removed caps and aprons for a fitful sleep, had come running through the baize door under the staircase, which Miss Lumley in a purple dressing gown and curl papers was descending with a lighted candle. Smelling salts were produced for Mademoiselle, and brandy, and with Tom's help the governess was carried off to her room. 'Oh, the poor things,' said Cook, 'they look worn out - whatever can have happened at the picnic? Quick, Minnie, don't bother asking the Madam, we'll give them some of my hot soup.'

'Miss Lumley . . . get these girls to bed immediately. Minnie will help you . . . Now, Mr Hussey.' The door of Mrs Appleyard's sitting-room closed behind the broad still magnificently upright weary back. 'If I might have a drop of spirits, Ma'am, before I begin.'

'You may - I see you are exhausted . . . Now then, tell me as briefly and plainly as you can, exactly what has happened.'

'My God, Ma'am, if only I could tell you . . . you see, that's the worst of it. . . Nobody knows what's happened. Three of your young ladies and Miss McCraw are missing at the Rock.'

Extract from Ben Hussey's story as given to Constable Bumper of Woodend, on the morning of Sunday, February the fifteenth, at the Police Station.

*After the two teachers and myself realized that nobody in our party had the correct time, both my own watch and Miss McCraw's having stopped during the drive out, it was agreed that we should leave the Picnic Grounds as soon as convenient after lunch, as Mrs Appleyard was expecting us*

internal voice of authorial voice



back at the College no later than eight o'clock. The French lady arranged we should have some tea and cake after I had harnessed up my horses as we had a fairly long drive ahead of us. I should say it was then about half past three, judging by the way the shadows were moving on the Rock.

As soon as my billies were boiling I went over to tell the two ladies in charge that tea was ready. The elderly teacher who had been sitting reading under a tree when I had last seen her, was not there. In fact, I never saw her again. The French lady seemed very upset and asked me if I had noticed Miss McCraw walking away from the camp, which I had not. She told me: 'None of the girls saw which way she went. I can't understand her not being back here on time - Miss McCraw is such a punctual lady.' I asked, if all the rest of my passengers were present and ready to leave. She told me: 'All but four. With my permission they went for a short walk along the creek so as to get a closer view of the Hanging Rock. All except Edith Horton are senior girls and very reliable.' The three missing girls had travelled with me to the Picnic Grounds on the box seat. I knew them quite well. They were Miss Miranda (I never heard her surname), Miss Irma Leopold and Miss Marion Quade.

I wasn't particularly worried so far, only a bit put out by the delay in getting away. I know that part of the country pretty well and I soon had the girls organized to look for them, in pairs, round about the creek on the flat, cooeing and calling out as they went. About an hour must have gone by when the girl Edith Horton came running out of the scrub near the South Western base of the Rock,

crying and laughing and with her dress torn to ribbons. I thought she was going to have a fit of hysterics. She said she had left the other three girls 'somewhere up there', pointing to the Rock, but seemed to have no idea in which direction. We asked her over and over again to try and remember which way they had gone, but all we could get out of her was that she had got frightened and had run back downhill all the way. Luckily, I always carry some emergency brandy in my flask. We gave her some and wrapped her up in my driving coat and Miss Rosamund (one of the senior girls) took her off to lie down in the drag while we went on with the search. I called all the girls back and counted them and this time we went further afield - right up to the base of the Rock on the southern elevation, trying to find Edith Horton's tracks but they had petered out almost at once on stony ground. Without a magnifying glass it was impossible to see anything in the way of a footprint. None of the scrub seemed to be disturbed except for a few yards where she had come out on to the open ground and started to run back towards our camp at the creek. For further reference, we marked the opening between these trees with some sticks. Meanwhile two of the senior girls had gone off along the creek intending to make some enquiries from another picnic party who were there when we arrived, before lunch, but they had put out their fire and left - probably while I was attending to my horses. Four people and a wagonette. I think it was Colonel Fitzhubert's but did not actually see any of them to speak to. Several of the girls said they had seen this wagonette driving away earlier in the afternoon with the young fellow on the white Arab pony



riding behind. We must have gone on calling and searching for several hours. I couldn't believe my senses that three or four sensible people could disappear so quickly in such a comparatively small area without some kind of tracks. I am still just as mystified as I was yesterday afternoon.

As even the lowest and most accessible levels of the Rock are exceedingly treacherous, especially for inexperienced girls in long summer dresses, I was afraid of letting them out of my sight in case they got lost themselves what with the holes and precipices and to my knowledge only one over-grown track leading towards the summit, which presumably the missing persons did not take, as I made a point of looking there very thoroughly at the point where it starts. There were no signs of crushed undergrowth, footprints, etc., either here or anywhere else.

As it grew later and darker – we had no means of knowing the time except by the sinking sun – we lit a number of fires along the creek in such a way that they could be seen from various angles by anyone on this side of the Rock. We also kept on cooeing as loudly as we could singly and all together. I got the two billies and beat on them with the crowbar I always keep in the drag for emergencies.

By this time the French lady and I were at our wits' end to decide whether to drive back to Woodend with the news or to go on looking. We had only the two oil lamps on the drag and my hurricane lamp lit up a few square yards at a time. If the missing persons were still somewhere on the Rock, which I had begun to doubt, without matches they would be in real danger after dark unless they had

the sense to sit tight in a cave until daylight. The French lady and some of the girls were getting a bit hysterical and no wonder. None of us had had so much as a cup of tea since lunchtime. We were too worried to think of making it. We had some lemonade and biscuits and I decided to take the party back to the College without looking any more that night.

I don't honestly know if I did right to act as I did but I take full responsibility for the decision. I am pretty well acquainted with the three missing girls and I reckoned that unless they had all three met with an accident which seemed unlikely, Miss Miranda who is well used to the Bush would have kept her head and found some safe place to shelter for the night. As for the teacher, I hope for her own sake she didn't wander off on her own. A knowledge of arithmetic don't help much in the Bush. ✓✓

After calling in at the police station at Woodend, on the way home, and briefly informing the officer on duty what had occurred at the Hanging Rock, we drove to Appleyard College without further delay. I forgot to mention that I made a careful investigation of the public lavatories (Ladies and Gents) situated at the Picnic Grounds about half way between the creek and the base of the Rock. There were no footprints or any other signs of recent use.

*Significance of the report on reader in the narrative?*



College! He had always, she remembered complacently, called her his financial genius. Already the College was paying handsome dividends . . . A few minutes later, still in the best of tempers, and determined to be gracious on this pleasant holiday afternoon, she appeared at the schoolroom door. 'Well, Sara, I hope you have learned your poetry so that you can go into the garden for the rest of the afternoon. Minnie shall bring you some tea and cake.'

The scraggy, big-eyed child who had automatically risen from the desk when the Headmistress entered, was shifting uneasily from one black stockinged spindle-shank to another. 'Well? Stand up straight when you answer me, please, and put your shoulders back. You are getting a dreadful stoop. Now then. Have you got your lines by heart?'

'It's no use, Mrs Appleyard. I can't learn them.'

'How do you mean you can't? Considering you have been alone in here with your Reader ever since luncheon?'

'I have tried,' said the child, passing her hand over her eyes. 'But it's so silly. I mean if there was any sense in it I could learn it ever so much better.'

'Sense? You little ignoramus! Evidently you don't know that Mrs Felicia Hemans is considered one of the finest of our English poets.'

Sara scowled her disbelief of Mrs Hemans' genius. An obstinate difficult child. 'I know another bit of poetry by heart. It has ever so many verses. Much more than "The Hesperus". Would that do?'

'Hm . . . What is this poem called?'

"An Ode to Saint Valentine". For a moment the little pointed face brightened; looked almost pretty.

'I am not acquainted with it,' said the Headmistress, with due caution. (One couldn't in her position be too careful; so many quotations turned out to be Tennyson or Shakespeare.) 'Where did you find it, Sara - this, er, Ode?'

'I didn't find it. I wrote it.'

'You wrote it? No, I don't wish to hear it, thank you. Strange as it may seem, I prefer Mrs Hemans'. Give me your book and proceed to recite to me as far as you have gone.'

'I tell you, I can't learn that silly stuff if I sit here for a week.'

'Then you must go on trying a little longer,' said the Head, handing over the Reader, outwardly calm and reasonable, and sick to death of the sullen tight-lipped child. 'I shall leave you now, Sara, and expect you to be word perfect when I send Miss Lumley in half an hour. Otherwise, I am afraid I shall have to send you to bed instead of sitting up until the others return for supper after the picnic.' The schoolroom door closed, the key turned in the lock, the hateful presence swept from the room.

Out in the gay green garden beyond the schoolroom the bed of dahlias glowed as if they were on fire, caught by the late afternoon sun. At the Hanging Rock, Mademoiselle and Miranda would be pouring out tea under the trees . . . Resting her heavy head on the inkstained lid of the desk the child Sara burst into wild angry sobs. 'I hate her . . . I hate her . . . Oh, Bertie, Bertie, where are you? Jesus, where are you? If you are really watching the sparrows fall like it says in the Bible, why don't you come down and take me away? Miranda says I mustn't hate people even if they are wicked. I can't help it, darling Miranda . . . I hate her! I hate her!'

Sara Character Sketch